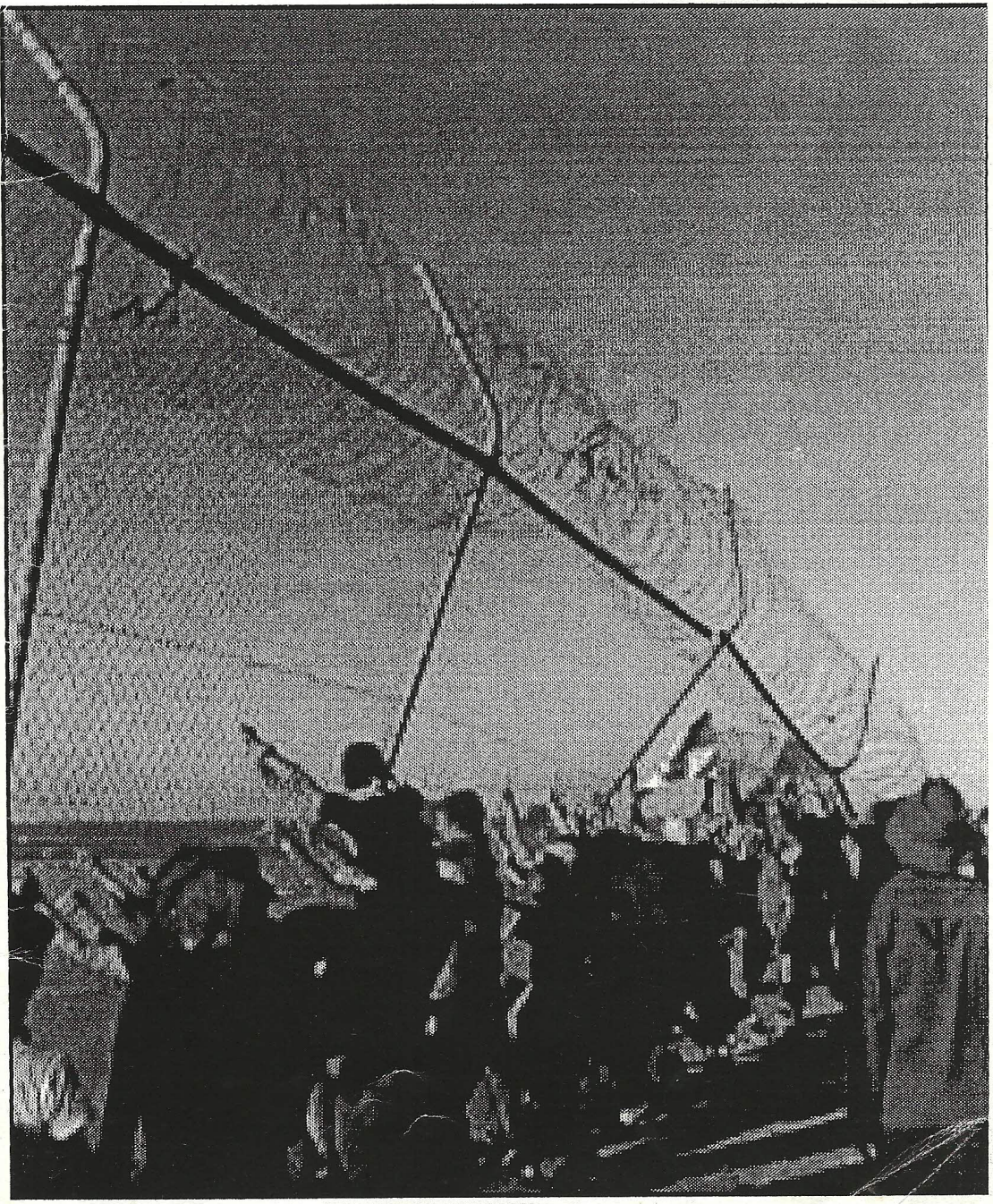
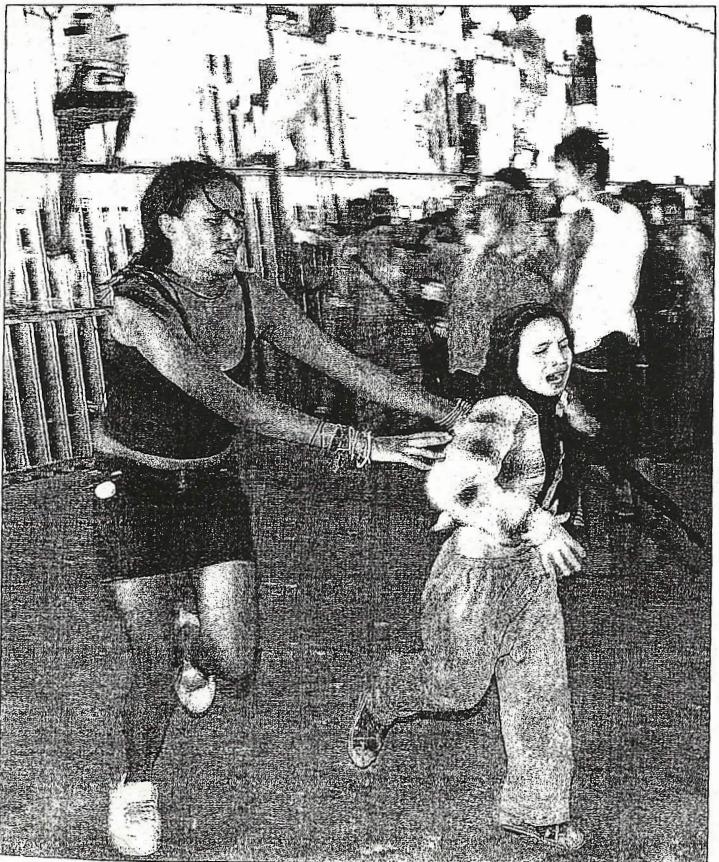
enRAged

"the journal of Revolutionary Action"



Freedom – Yes!

The Easter protests at Womera brought us some of the most inspiring scenes seen in Australia for many years, as people tear down the fences erected by the government and run to meet each other. The Woomera action contains a symbolism which is truly remarkable: people struggling from both sides of the fence, to break in and to break out. The images of razor wire walls falling against the stark desert sky, of people running out screaming "free at last", with wide smiles and tears streaming down their faces, of people skirmishing with the police and APS for a serious purpose, pictures of furious solidarity and raging compassion – these images will live with us for a long time, and hopefully they will encourage more and more people to take direct action against these monstrosities, these monuments to unfreedom which Labour and Liberal alike have built.



Bloodied: Cut by razor wire while trying to flee

On the run: A detainee flees, fist in the air

The actions at Woomera have caught the authorities by surprise. No one in charge, it seems, foresaw the possibility of hundreds of people overpowering the security guards and breaking into the camp. The Australian Protective Services and the South Australian police, far outnumbered, found themselves in one of those typical conundrums that affect authority when faced by a wave of popular force: who controlled this area? Whose jurisdiction was it? Whilst they passed the hot potatoes around, the people, who could not care less about jurisdictions and invisible lines, stormed in. All this is amazing and these actions without doubt make up one of the most important protests in Australia's history.

Even the Sydney Morning Herald in an editorial the following week, while condemning the "violent, illegal" break-out, and calling the events "disturbing", went on to say that "the extraordinary nature of this demonstration must give pause." This was "not just another march down a city street" - "as acts of civil disobedience go this one was so remarkable that it cannot be lightly dismissed. In time, the Woomera demonstration will not be seen by history as Mr. Howard and Mr Ruddock are presenting it."

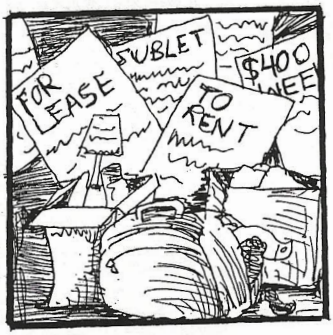
To say that the actions at Woomera are immensely significant is not hyperbole. This event marks a crucial break from the previous strategy of the antiborders movement: for the past two years the main thrust has been to build as much solidarity with the inmates as possible, to establish communications, to attempt to galvanise community opinion, to hold marches and protests and carry palm fronds. Now a distinct possibility has been advanced: that the camps ought to be literally destroyed, and the people therein freed by popular force. No leaders, no ultimatum, not even an ideology simply the destruction of the fences and the mutual liberation of those locked in and those locked out.

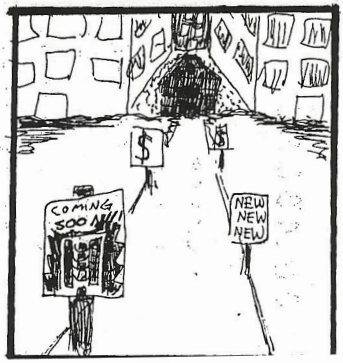
The notion of eliminating border controls is extremely radical and challenges the very idea that our rights derive from grants made by a sovereign government; it runs counter to the idea of citizenship upon which much of the current blather about the camps is based. The real issue is unfreedom. Another important dimension in which actions at Woomera simply do not fit into the spectrum of conservative and liberal policies is that a fundamental aspect of this campaign is to state that borders and camps imprison we who are supposedly free on the outside. This is not meant in the metaphorical sense that if my brother is unfree so am I, although this is true enough. The meaning is quite literal: that camps are instruments not only for imprisoning people but also for regulating and controlling the population on the outside. This happens in a number of ways, of which the scapegoating effect is only the most obvious. Having the state determine, cynically and for political motives, as it invariably turns out, that some people are "legitimate" is a means by which reality can be sculpted to fit ideology: Afghanistan may be a hellhole, but our guys run it now, so there is no reason why people ought to seek asylum here anymore.

The ultimate expression of antiborder thought is the demolition of the camps and the sort of civil disobedience which would allow escapees to function in society with a sufficient degree of freedom. That, in our current state of organisation, many freed refugees will be returned to their cells and the fences mended is not only an argument for the danger of performing such actions, but also a constructive criticism encouraging us to go further, to develop better ways of ridding ourselves of the border controls and camps. What the serious criticisms emanating from civil society mean is not that we should stop, they mean rather that this is the time when a crucial decision will have to be made as to how to liberate ourselves and our imprisoned comrades. One path is conciliation and polite criticism. This is not an entirely bleak path: perhaps over a long period of time the camps will be shut, people freed, border controls eased. Perhaps better men and women will take the reigns of power from the despicable and miserly Ruddock. But this is not at all assured. It is just as likely, that conciliation and polite

criticism will lead us to a dreadful stalemate that benefits only the status quo or worse, that Ruddock will prevail and Australia will become a model of future regimes of population control.

The other path which has been bravely broken at Woomera is to disobey unfair laws, free the refugees by force if necessary and demolish the camps. If this is performed in a wide enough scale, if enough people refuse to cooperate, if enough people help escapees live outside, if the attacks on the fences are strong enough then maybe, just maybe, a freedom will be won which will not have been granted to us by better leaders, but made by ourselves for ourselves.





NO MORE DISPOSSESSED

THEY DESTROY OUR LAND

NO MORE DISAPPEARED

THEY BOMB OUR TOWNS

THEY STARVE OUR CHILDREN

WE ARE ALL REFUGEES

NO MORE AUSHWITZS

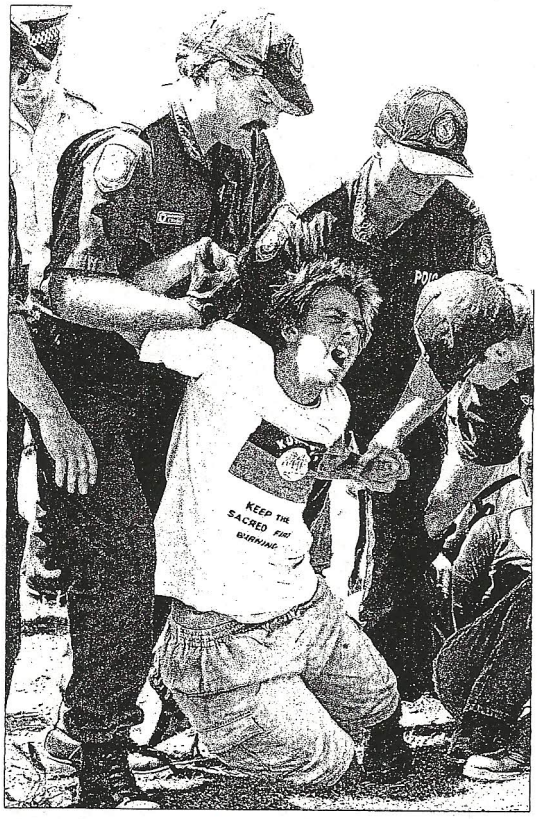
NO MORE WOOMERAS

BLOCKADE

Sandon Point, near Bulli on the South Coast of NSW; the afternoon of 14 February 2002; Valentine's Day.

It is a hot sunny day in Bulli. For the last four days hundreds of picketers have waited for the police to attempt to break their line in order to allow Stocklands Corporation move heavy equipment onto Sandon Point. Early in the afternoon the Tactical Response Group march up the street in formation. They are backed up by local police who line up paddy wagons, with their doors open, ready for mass arrests. Polair circles the disputed territory. The police instruct people to move or be arrested. People link arms, sit down and no-one moves. As the police start to wrest us apart and drag people away, more people join the picket. Some locals who have no intention of being arrested find they cannot stand by and watch, they join the picket, sit down and link arms. The police use choke holds and other violence against those defying them. A couple of chair-bound picketing pensioners are carted aside. A relay of paddy wagons ferries most of those arrested to a nearby police station for

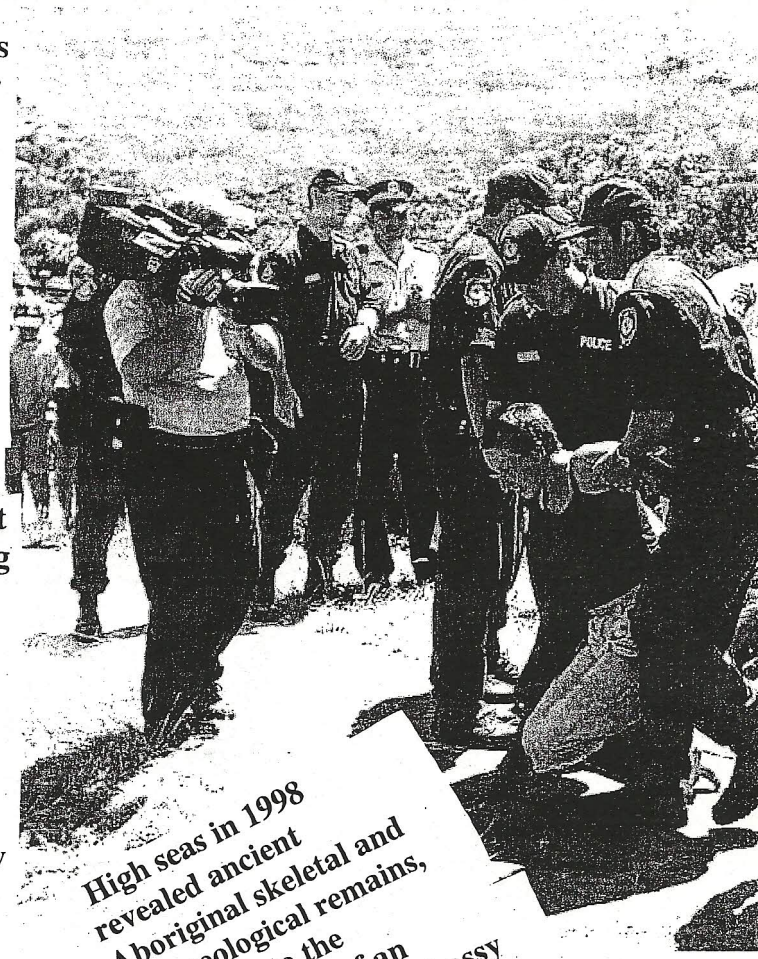
processing. The station is one of those closed by restructuring. A couple of local angry older women confront senior police supervising the operation. Why was the station been specially opened today when appeals for local policing have long been ignored? they ask. A police rescue unit is on hand; three tow trucks remove blockading vehicles; a cherry picker is called in to help remove a tripod sitter from his eyrie. One picketer collapses during the melee and requires an ambulance. The massive exercise in policing takes the best part of three hours trying to clear away some 200 picketers. Around seventy people were arrested.



Earlier in the week company security personnel had paraded in the area, carrying side arms slung low in gunfighter style; Rottweilers and their handlers were also on display. On the day of the action a company agent was busy with a camera, photographing protesters and the number plates of private cars parked in the area; the usual prelude to intimidatory legal

actions. The company is the multi-million dollar developer Stocklands, with former NSW Premier Nick Greiner on the Board. The picketers were part of the community picket line that had been blockading the site 24 hours a day for a year;

An Aboriginal Tent Embassy and the picket line had been contesting the right of Stocklands to develop the site, one that is of great Aboriginal cultural significance. The wider community has thrown support behind the picket and tent embassy with people from many walks of life fighting side-by-side for the preservation of such an important cultural, historical and natural site.

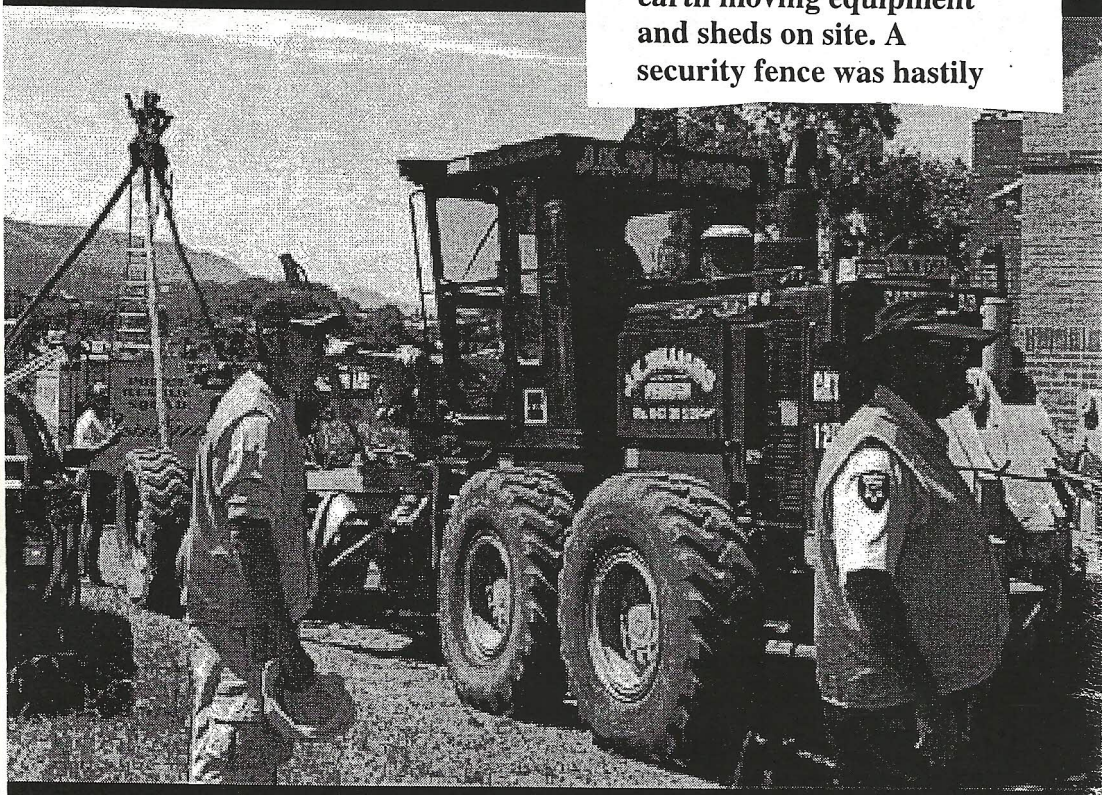


High seas in 1998 revealed ancient Aboriginal skeletal and archaeological remains, which led to the establishment of an Aboriginal Tent Embassy once the area was directly threatened with development. Local knowledge claims that similar finds were tampered with by official instrumentalities during the 1970s. The site is home to rare and endangered flora and fauna, is part remnant native wetland, part flood plain, a locally treasured community open space,

and a vital green corridor to the foreshore from the environmentally and geologically sensitive escarpment that overlooks the region. The beach is renowned for its world class surf. The Stocklands' development

waterview allotments. Word has it that the blocks will come on the market at about a million bucks each.

Once police had broken the picket line, the developer moved heavy earth moving equipment and sheds on site. A security fence was hastily



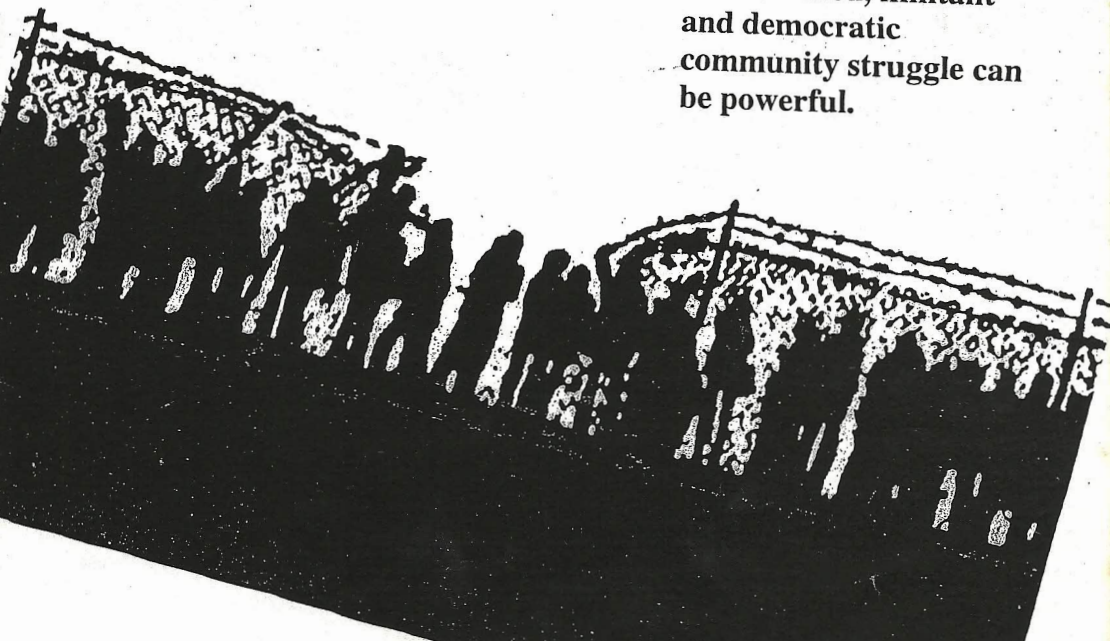
got the final go-ahead following contentious consent from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to "destroy an Aboriginal place". Stockland's plan is an extensive upmarket subdivision comprising

erected by non-unionised workers brought in from out-of town . No sooner had the fence been erected than an injunction came through halting work on the site. Aboriginal groups had filed and won the

injunction in the Land and Environment Court. So, Stocklands were forced to turn around and remove their equipment, although they initially left the fence up. As people chanted "OUT, OUT, OUT" the Stockland trucks retreated and the TRG marched back down the road. No sooner had all the police left than a group of picketers pulled the fence down and swarmed over the re-occupied land. Local young people joyously rode their bikes up and down over the fence crushing it into the ground as they reclaimed their space.

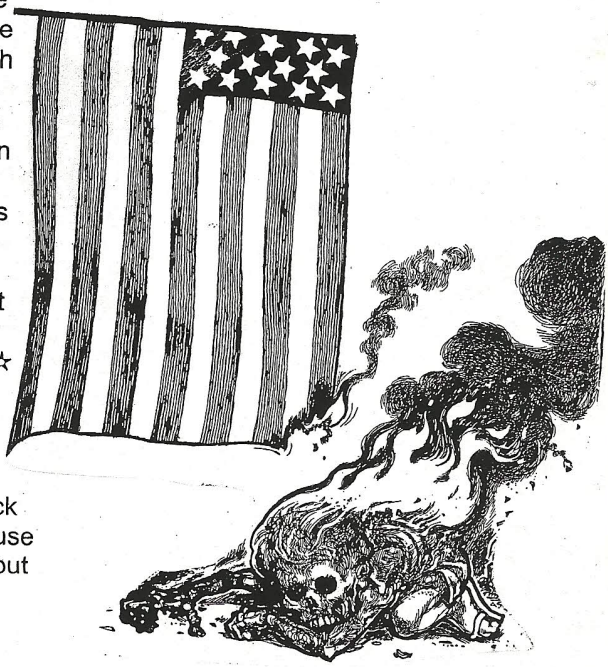
SUBVERT

As *enRAged* goes to press the court is still deliberating and the community picket and the Tent Embassy remain at Sandon Point. Whatever the courts decide this community will fight on. This type of defiance helps keep capitalist forces off-balance and increasingly emboldens and empowers the working class as their own liberators. The open defiance of the bosses and the cops by a broad cross section of the community is an important act of resistance. The valentines day blockade was self organised and militant. It helped to demonstrate how a united, militant and democratic community struggle can be powerful.



Total War or Total Liberation

☆ I would like to start by saying that I feel nothing but sympathy and sorrow for the people who died and the families left to grieve for them due to the hijackings and attacks that occurred in the USA on the 11th September. However I write this motivated by concern for the living. For those who face a world of increased suffering. For those who face the barrel of a global military machine. For those who will fill the body bags and for those who are left to clean up. I write this with concern for my comrades and friends and family including those who I have never met; who live in both Afghanistan and New York; both in Gaza and Tela Viv .For those on boats and for all of us adrift. I write this for those of us who make up the multitude who turn the world through our actions. I hope that it can contribute to building a culture of refusal against the war that is to come.☆



Seeing through the Bullshit

The media coverage of the "Attack on America" or "America's New War" (to use that terminology of CNN) has been wide but it has not been deep. Whilst in theory the mass media is meant to play the role of a "fourth estate", a watch-dog against the excess of governmental and commercial power, it is patently part of the status quo that it was meant to keep in check. Thus since September 11th we have been treated to a spectacle of suffering, nationalism and sabre rattling: all sown together to drown out any voices of dissent against the impending march towards war. The sheer size of the media barrage, its over bearing emotional weight, and its ability to create the appearance of social consensus make it hard to even question the systems increased militarisation let along begin to organize against it. But question and organize we must.

The secret of corporate propaganda is that it tries to create an unchallengable chain of logic that denies any room for critical thought. Everything is portrayed in black and white. One side is good, one side is evil. Historical analysis and ambiguity are rejected for ahistorical posturing. We are not offered options to be debated out and pondered, to be decided on by the people but forced certainties to be accepted. Thus in the current crisis, the powerful and elite show a world view where the only option is bloodshed. Where freedom is synonymous with Western Capitalism and it's corresponding military dominance of the globe. Where those who oppose this domination are inherently "terrorists" and share the blame and responsibility for the tragedies of September 11 2001. Where it is logical that to save "democracy" we must destroy it and to create peace we must go to war.

Since this line of rhetoric does not hold up to questioning, it can only be maintained by creating hysteria. In Orwell's 1984 the ideal party member is some one "whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation and orgiastic triumph". This is the emotional spectrum of the New World Order. Rather then letting the dead find a peaceful and dignified rest and remembrance, their images are constantly being dragged up, plastered over the papers and the TV screens to justify to those at home that more deaths are necessary. The shock of people being killed in the 1st world rather than in the third (where 40,000 would have starved to death on that very same day, but with no media attention) has become not an event that wakes us out of the little complacency we had left in an ailing and crisis ridden system, but is used to confirm its most hideous aspects: war, terror, racism and genocide.

However now, as a people, we are faced with options, with choices. Some of these choices may lead to increased liberation, to the challenging of the global class divide and a world build on exploitation and violence. Others may further deepen the divisions of power at great cost to the freedom and safety of the people and environment of the earth. To begin to negotiate these pathways we need, more than ever, critical thought, empathy, and a complex understanding of people and societies. We need an anger that seeks to preserve life rather than destroy it. With that mind, I would like to take some time now, to look at the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the West's push for war and strategies for freedom and peace.

The Womb of Terror

In the most broad terms the suicide bombings" that happened in the US are an expression of the great misery of the World. The destruction and uprooting of subsistance societies across the globe over the last 500 years to pave the way for and entrench the global sweat shop of industrial capitalism has been paid for by massive suffering and thus a deep black cloud of hopelessness lives in the world's soul. The political life of the globe is one of despair; its culture is a culture of despair. From urban centers in the North to banana plantations and barrios in the South, Capital encloses off public spaces and resources, and subjects the population to alienating and oppressive wage-labor. Patriarchal relationships are cemented between men and women; racial divisions are manufactured and manipulated. We are ripped from the Earth that surrounds us as it is polluted and destroyed. We feel both incredibly atomised and alienated and increasingly lost in a giant mass. Whilst these conditions can produces a visceral and intellectual revolt against the system that keeps us down, it can also create feelings of hatred that we take out on our selves and our communities and other members of the oppressed. Drug abuse, religious fundamentalism, random acts of violence big and small, whilst by no means the same or equal share a common root: they are hopeless reactions to feelings of hopeless ness.

However there is of cause a more specific rationale. These terrorist attacks are just one part, one battle of the never-end war for control of the oil-rich and highly strategic Middle East. It is a war that is of critical importance to modern capitalism and one that we must understand and resist if we are to create on earth the free world that lives in our hearts and dreams.

Oil is Capitalism's Crack

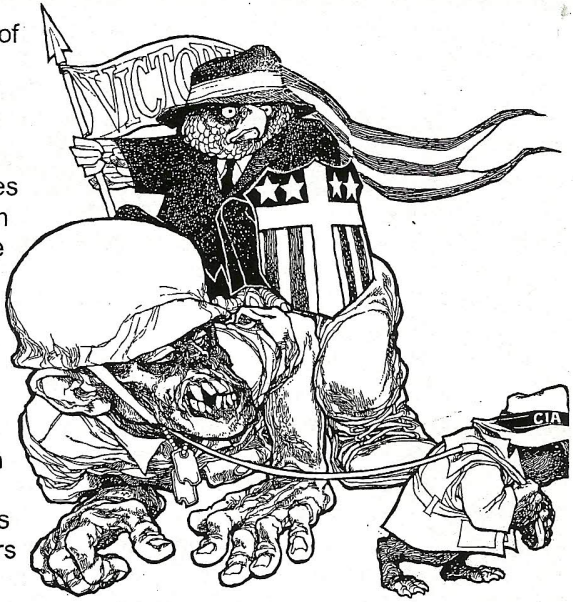
The last 25 years have been years of a capitalist counter-attack against the conditions of the people globally. Through these years of austerity and repression Oil has played a central role. Simply put energy, is a way the Capitalism can "escape" the demands of workers by replacing living human beings with machines. The Oil and motor industries are at the "centre" of the

global economy and are fundamental tier of the status quo.(both George Senior & George W. have personal links to the Oil Industry). Oil is in many ways, the central commodity of international trade, "as the price of oil goes up or down, all other prices tend to rise or fall accordingly"[1]. Capitalism has demanded more and more Oil and the conditions of its production are one of its central concerns.

However, unfortunately for Capitalism, where ever it goes it creates opposition to its self. People on the whole don't deal well with being exploited and having their natural resources robbed from them. Also for most of this century Capitalism has been divided into numerous blocks. The major ones for the last 50 years were the western or "free" nations and the eastern or "socialist" ones. The fact that neither was either free or socialist mattered little: they were in opposition to each other.

Ruling classes have two major ways of dealing with opposition: violence and co-option. To suppress the demands of the people and to keep at bay the soviets a matrix of repression was constructed by the Western Ruling Class. It consisted on one hand of making alliance with local elites and further integrating into the matrix of capitalist production. On the other violently putting down popular resistance and overthrowing and subverting nations that opposed the terms of this integration. One example would be the funding of reactionary groups like Islamic fundamentalists to capture the hearts and the minds of ordinary people, terrorize dissenters and to provided cannon fodder to use against pro-soviet regimes. It is out of this fertile soil that September 11 attacks grew.

Despite the rhetoric of "freedom" and "democracy" first world nations like Australia, the UK and the USA clothe themselves in, these nation-states have only one master: the ruling class. The interests of the ruling class: cheap labour, access to natural resources, increasing industrialization, increasing commodity



production and a secure business environment; are the only real concerns. Thus Western nations mainly through secret services like the CIA have propped up numerous violent and repressive regimes. This is especially true in the Middle East. Bloody regimes like Saddam Hussien's in Iraq, the Shah in Iran were propped up and armed by the West. These regimes were the appendages of the global economic system, murdering thousands who refused to accept the status quo.

Such is the tragic history of Afghanistan. In 1979 Soviet troops poured into to support the troubled People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The USA responded by arming and funding the Islamic Fundamentalist opposition (the mujaheddin). The US government gave some where between US$ 6-20 billion dollars worth of military aid from 1978 to 1992.[2] A giant infrastructure was created to funnel in arms and men to the mujaheddin. This was a massive operation consisting of everything from arms and opium trading, military training camps and a network of religious schools and facilities used to recruit

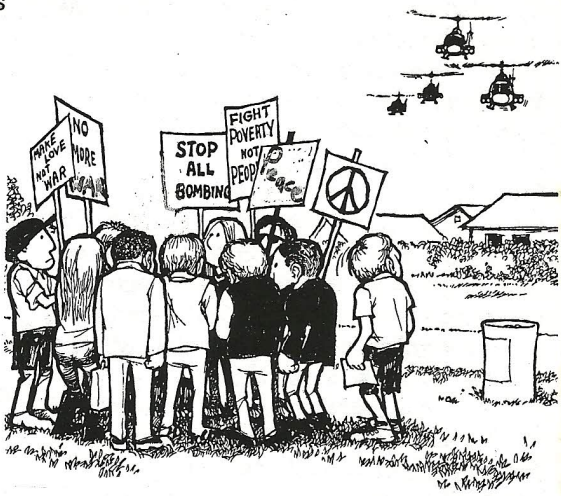
young men from all over the Islamic world as soldiers. The CIA and the Pakistani secret service the ISI closely over saw it. Somewhere between 1987-1988, the now infamous Al-Qaeda (the Base) groups was established (with Osama Bin-Laden in charge) to run the training camps and various other business interests[3].

Tragically and also bitterly ironic many of the tactics that Islamic terrorists use were taught to them by western experts. English SAS trooper Tom Carew who fought with the mujaheddin states "The Americans were keen to teach the Afghans the techniques of Urban terrorism- car bombing and so on- so they could strike at the Russians in major towns".[4] After the Russians withdrew the various different Afghan mujaheddin factions decided to blow the shit out of each other. The ultra-reactionary Taliban came to power in 1996. The Taliban was a creation of specifically the ISI and Saudi Arabia. It is worth noting however, that the CIA as the central cog in the world terror machine would have had its fingers in these pies. The Taliban's harsh rule was supported and aided in an attempt to "stabilise" the country and allow the construction of Oil pipelines from the post-soviet central Asian nations. A regime that was hostile to the West's old nemesis Iran would also be a boon. Another example of dirty politics, a scramble for resources and the mountains of misery that is the cost.

"But hang on I hear" you say, "it sounds like such a cosey relationship, where did it all go wrong?" Where indeed.

Well there are a couple of different theories.

One is that the stationing of non-Muslim western soldiers in Saudi Arabia that contains important Islamic holy sites such as the city Mecca) since the Gulf War, greatly offended the religious sensibilities of people like Bin Laden. Hmm maybe but I think there are some deeper reasons.



The whole globe suffers under the weight of capitalism. Over the last 25 years through a matrix of national governments, transnational companies, bodies like the IMF, treaties like NAFTA, the formation of Special Economic Zones, and the like, greater austerity and intensified work has been the bitter bread that we have been given. Capitalism has dedicated itself to rolling back whatever gains we have grabbed from its hands. Yet rather than ending the struggles of the people, it has intensified them. People have risen in numerous different ways all over the globe. No where is this more obvious than the Middle East.

Again and again people have rebelled. From Palestinians fighting Zionist occupiers, to students resisting religious oppression in Iran. From rioters in Jordan to armed rebellion in southern Iraq. This has split the ruling classes throughout the region. The majority continues to peruse the further integration into the world economy. A minority however realizes that this may unleash a world wind of anger that will bring them down. Groups of them often under the cloak of Islamic fundamentalism are trying to challenge the dominant order, to get more of spoils of Oil produced in the area, so they can buy off dissent.

Things have come to a head. Early this year Saudi Arabia began to enter even more deeply into the world economy.

Everything from Oil to land ownership was opened up to foreign investors.

It is yet unclear if the attacks on September 11th were actual order by Bin Ladan and carried out by the Al-Quada group. But if they were you can see why. Faced with Saudi Arabia's (in many ways the political, economic and religious axis of the Middle East) further participation in the broader global economy, its ever increasing interrelationship with capitalism at large the dissident rulers face the choice of civil war or oblivion. They chose war

This is not a Holy war or a campaign for "infinite justice" and "enduring freedom": its just another dumb boss's war. The bombing of Tripoli in 1986, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, 50 years of fighting in Palestine, decades of civil war in Lebanon, the war in Chad, and 21+ years of War in Afghanistan: they are all just chapters in the continual blood bath over who controls the Middle East; continual slaughter over what price Oil is set at, and continual attempts to brutalize the people into submission.

Globalised Violence.

Those who rule in the capitals of the West also want war as much as those who rule from Kabul. Despite all George W. Bush's rhetoric about ending terror, the violence that is raining down on Kabul has very little to do with the attacks that happened on September 11th. If any thing the murder of 6000 people is being used as a cynical excuse for global militarisation and global violence. This is not a war against Osama Bin-Laden: it is a war against the people of the entire earth.

Capitalism is facing two inter linked crises: economic recession and global ungovernability. All over the world the people are organising and fighting back. On all fronts people are attacking the system and refusing to obey. The cities of the West have had their veils of defeat and disinterest torn from them in explosions of mass action. Peasants and farmers from across the globe are occupying land and burning GM crops. This is just the tip of the iceberg. From Genoa to Port Moresby the people have faced off against the state and have started constructing new ways of living with their own two hands.

As another recession looms inevitably upon the economic horizon, the situation is a tinderbox. Here we have the largest, most international, combined and militant struggles since god knows when and all the system can offer is more hardship.

For the ruling class there is only one option: war or the dustbin of history. They have chosen war.

War creates guaranteed demand: a steady market that uses up a vast array of expensive products. The military-industrial complex is at the centre of the world economy. Increased contracts between military manufactures and governments is just corporate welfare: paid for with the bodies of the poor.

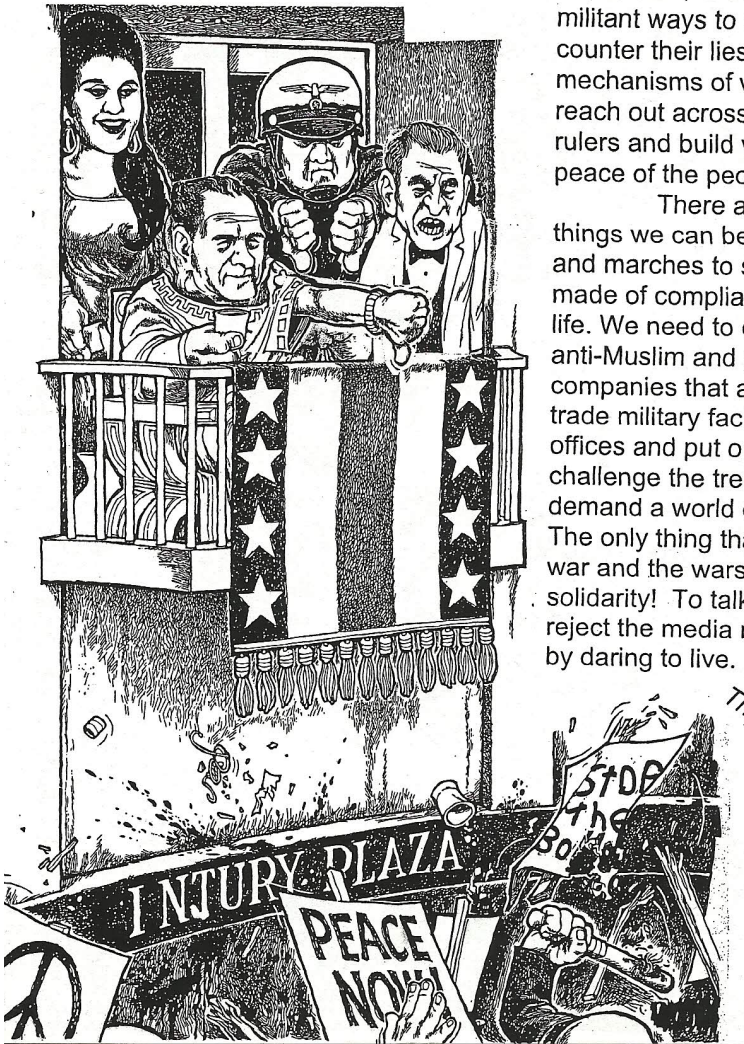
War will whip up mass hysteria and nationalism. Who will be able to ask questions, to demand the sanctity of life, to question the necessity of bombing refugees under the blare of the national anthems? In the name of the national interest civil liberties will be cracked down upon, dissent will be made more difficult. Already the government in Australia is drafting legislation that will give ASIO vastly increased powers. The term "terrorist" will be used to label and discredit any opposition and to create an atmosphere of suspicion and to justify intense repression.

As the bombs rain down on Kabul the waters are being tested: how much will the people who live in the "home countries", the West, who are so powerful but forget it except? Capitalism needs peace at "home" to wage war "abroad". If they can do all this, can they also bomb the rebels in Columbia, the Zapatistas in Mexico? If the public accepts sending in ground troops, how long can it be till there are landing craft on the beaches of Cuba? The system is fighting this war to see if it can fight a thousand.

Marching on thin ice.

But do not give into despair. Capitalism can not win. It can not blow its way out of social contradictions. All it can do is create a mountain of corpses.

The ruling class is taking an extreme risk, hoping that it can challenge the people of the globe with its military might. But bombs on Kabul will not reduce debt in Mexico or give land to Brazilian peasants. SAS troops in Kandahar will not bring back the jobs in Wollongong or reduces the 60hr week people work in offices. It will not give us freedom or sate our hunger for a better life. All it will do is create a cycle of violence.



It strips the veil of "democracy" for the tyrants and exposes the system for what it is naked violence holding a missile in one hand and a gun in the other; guzzling oil and life.

The mighty hope that the experiences of struggle that we have gained, our sense of our power will just melt away. They won't. They remain. The mighty hope that the organisations and spaces: the human networks of refusal we have created with just wither and die. They won't. The struggles and solidarity live on

The ice may crack.

It is up to us to challenge the consensus, to begin to find creative and militant ways to subvert the war machine. To counter their lies, to monkey wrench the mechanisms of war. To incite mutiny. To reach out across borders, to bypass the rulers and build with our own hands the peace of the people.

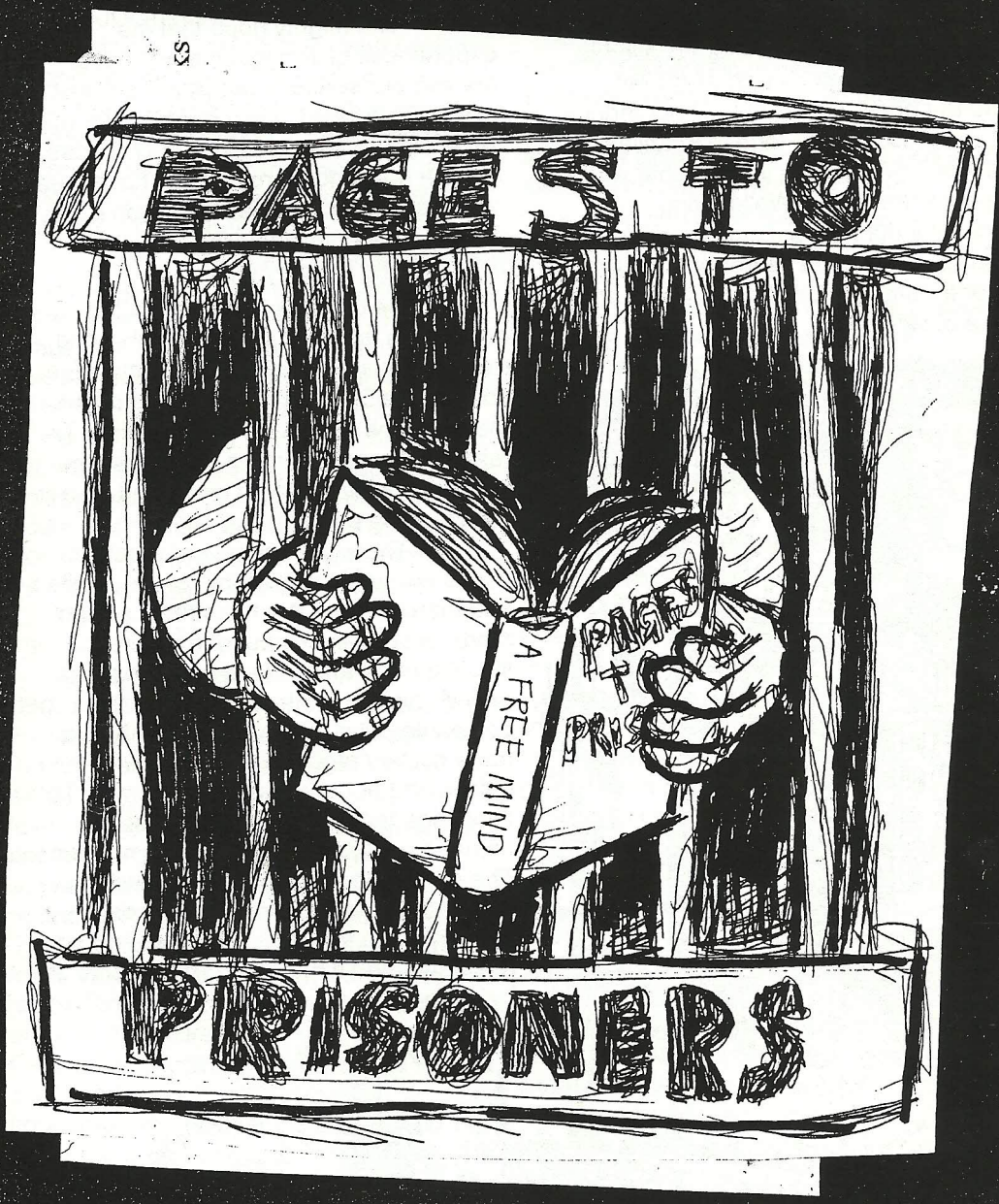
There are some very practical things we can begin to do. Simple protests and marches to show the streets are not made of compliance but of a reverence for life. We need to do all we can to oppose anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism. To target companies that are involved in the arms trade military facilities and government offices and put our bodies on the line. To challenge the treatment of refugees, to demand a world of no rulers and no borders. The only thing that can stop the stop this war and the wars to come is international solidarity! To talk to those around us and reject the media monolith. To preserve life by daring to live.

Dave

This article has also been published in Mindless Commodity

many thanks to

Spider


PAGES TO
A FREE MIND
PRISONERS

A few of us have decided to start up a 'pages for prisoners' organisation, where we would aim to supply prisoners with books that they have requested, supplies for creative expression such as paints and so on, and to communicate with prisoners via letters. Whilst we think that prisons should not exist for a whole heap of reasons, and we recognise that the majority of those who are imprisoned are members of the most marginalised groups in our society (both of these issues go beyond the realm of this flier), we also think it's important for us to ask ourselves, whilst prisons are still being built, what ways we can make the experience of imprisonment more bearable for those who are inside. So in response to this question, Add compassion which drives the motivation to do something to meet the needs/wants of people inside particularly wimmin; a conviction in the importance of education and healing (which marginalised people have less opportunity to access); a knowledge about similar projects that have existed and still exist in places outside Australia; and a knowledge about the healing power of creativity; plus as a passion for books and you have this 'pages for prisoners' idea in progress.

We plan to start small, perhaps with Mulawa/ another wimmin's prison (with the hope of expanding some day). We would like any donations, new and old books, and art supplies and money to buy books and art supplies. We would also like some assistance in helping this idea get off the ground. If you want to help in any way, if you have any information about particular prisons in NSW (regarding how many books each prisoner is able to have in their cell, censorship and mail rules/policies), if you know some prisoners who want some books, or have other needs and can spread the word around, or if you'd just like some more information, please get in touch with us.

By mail:
P.O. Box 390
Engadine, NSW
2233

or

P.O. Box U69
Wollongong Uni
Wollongong, NSW
2525

By email:
pages_to_prisoners@lycos.com

Thankyou! Michelle & Christine

We have had our first meeting, and will meet again in late April. Please contact Christine on 42273803 if you are interested in attending or donating books.

WHY WE DO IT

P. to P. exists to alleviate pain, boredom, and attrition and to provide a direct opportunity for self-education. We exist because prison libraries don't, are understocked, or are only able to be patronized during specific and short hours. We exist because prisoners are not strangers: they are our brothers, friends, cousins, mothers, and children.

P.O. Box 069
Wollongong Uni
Wollongong NSW
2525

pages to prisoners

pages_to_prisoners@lycos.com

Prison Activism: Why Grassroots?

We need to:
1) Realise the importance of working with prisoners and the concept of self-determination.
2) Change public perception as we work and draw links to other struggles such as indigenous self-determination, welfare campaigns, anti-capitalist struggles and feminist struggles.
3) Understand and challenge the media's role in fostering fear and driving law and order hysteria.

It's not a questions of "choosing" grassroots methods of struggle over those that are typified as being reformist. There is no space for us to make a choice. We believe that grassroots struggle is the only effective way of achieving lasting change that alleviates the misery that we find in our everyday lives.

By grassroots we don't refer to a single tactic or method of organisation, but a vast constellation of struggles that arise from the situations of oppression that people find themselves in and utilise their own autonomous and collective power. It is about working with the people most effected by shortsighted and destructive policies – such as mandatory sentencing – and by attacking the causes of the problems (such as poverty, cultural genocide) rather than simply trying to fix the problems at the other end. It is possible, and often necessary, to lobby for positive reforms, but we can do this from a grassroots perspective in a collective and non-hierarchical way that does not mirror the institutions which we oppose.

Counter posed to this approach is the idea that change can be created through the same logic and methods of the status quo. This focus at creating "lobby" and "interest" groups that can bargain within the existing system,

rather than bargain against the system. The former methods lays the basis and leads to a healed, cooperative and libertarian society, the latter leads to defeat normally in the forms of either complete irrelevance or often worse – co-option.

It seems fundamentally important that those resisting the imprisonment of human beings on the outside and the inside of the jail walls recognise both the solidarity and autonomy of each other's struggles. Working together meaningfully means realising our common links, but also allowing different elements of struggles to chart their own course. Prisoners have already lost their voices, they have already been dehumanised by the media and the state to keep our society in a condition of social neurosis. **Without recognising prisoners desire and ability for self-determination, we (those outside the prison walls) are yet another group trying to define what "they" are and thus denying them control of their lives.** This replicates the hierarchical order of dominance and submission that prison-industrial complex underpins. Instead we wish for our sisters and brothers inside to be able to define their own pathways to liberation and build solid networks with them.

The methodology of the lobby group however, reduces the "oppressed" to frozen and powerless groups that are both incapable of self-determination and don't know what is good for them. **This is why it is important to work *with* women in prison rather than *for* women in prison.**

Prisons mean to disempower not only those in the prison, but also those outside the prisons. Our power will come not from working with the institutions that mean to disempower us. Their interests are continually found in our misery. Certainly a part of working against the systematic dehumanisation and exploitation of women, the poor, indigenous peoples is creating empowered voices not only

for those in the prisons but for those of us out of the prisons, voices from within and with these communities being continually exploited by the police, the legal system, and the prisons themselves.

From this perspective of creating communities with their own voices of change both within and out of the prison throughout the spectrum of our society, means that prisons are in no way a single issue separate from the broader struggles occurring around it.

The prison cannot be examined as an entity unto itself, as reformist groups working within the status quo have done. Instead we should try to understand the role that the prison plays in other oppressions and the general capitalist hierarchy of oppression. We must examine other struggles, women's rights, indigenous rights, anti-capitalist, environment, sexuality, etc. and see where they fit in the prison struggle and where the prison struggle fits in with them.

Prisons are not an inevitable aspect of human society but the result of specific attempts to further empower some and disempower others.

The prison it not designed to be a curative or healing institution. It does not mean to help the criminal and nor does it mean to protect the populace outside it's walls. Both of these myths must be torn down. This can only happen when we include prison struggles with other struggles and thus create broader struggles which resist not only the prisons, but also the atmosphere and power relations that create and foster the prison.

- Included as part of the Grassroots Anti-Jail Activism workshop hosted by Stop the Women's Jail at the Women in Prison conference, Nov. 2001.

Women in Prison conference, Brisbane, November 2001. Hosted by Sisters Inside.

I'd heard about the conference through the **Stop the Women's Jail** campaign, and was interested in attending. My interest in prison activism / prisoner support was solidified when I was involved in a pages to prisoners group in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. When writing to prisoners, I was confronted with their absolute isolation and oppression, and decided to get involved in prison support when I returned home.

Firstly, I checked out the website of the group that was hosting the conference. Sisters Inside (www.sistersinside.com.au) is a support and advocacy group run by and for women in prison. S.I. began when one woman inside a Brisbane prison decided to work for better conditions for women within prison.

> "Sister's Inside Inc. is an independent community organisation which exists to advocate for the human rights of women in the criminal justice system in Queensland, and to address gaps in services available to them. We will work alongside women in prison in determining the best way to fulfil these roles" (Walking the Talk).

S.I. was founded in 1992, and is currently involved in a range of work, including offering counselling services for women in prison and their children, conducting research to record women's prison conditions, and

lobbying for recognition of issues effecting women in prison. S.I. is structured in a hierarchical way - with a Steering Committee comprised of a group of women within the prison at the top. Debbie Kilroy, the woman who founded the group, is the director. S.I feels that this approach (rather than a collectivist style) ensures that it is the women inside who have the first and final say about what the group does.

The conference in Brisbane was to be the first that they had hosted. From what I read on the website, it was very well organised and much effort had gone into preparing. Speakers included Angela Davis (U.S scholar, feminist, activist), Diane Fingleton (Chief Stipendiary Magistrate), Jackie Huggins (Pirjara/Bidjara woman, author), Hon Matt Foley (Minister for the Arts). There was clearly a very wide range of people speaking at the conference - from indigenous women who had served life sentences and a woman once wanted by the FBI, to Ministers of Parliament and Correctional Officers. Ex-prisoners were given free admission, and the group (including me) who went up with the Stop the Women's Jail campaign were given reduced rates. So it seemed that while S.I. was clearly using the conference as a way to get women prison activists together, they were also

encouraging discussion from all areas of the 'justice system'.

The conference sought to allow many important voices to be heard - we were welcomed to country, and there was an workshop run by Aboriginal women. There was a violence workshop, three workshops dealing with theatre / therapy, a post-release and a drugs panel. There were workshops dealing with women prisoners who are cultural and linguistically diverse, a panel on women's health, prison labour, and children. Unfortunately I couldn't attend all of these workshops, as some were run concurrently.

The first session of the conference is a prime example of the cross-section of the speakers, and also of the many messages that were conveyed to those attending. The president of S.I., Anne Warner, introduced everyone. Diane Fingleton followed, a woman who has much power within the Queensland legal system. Diane spoke about her working class background, her younger years of left activism and how she's really making changes from where she is now. Angela Davis followed (one of the reasons I attended the conference), and spoke about the prison industrial complex, the war on drugs, the war on terrorisms' link to prisons and the bigger picture of

worldwide power and control over oppressed peoples. Debbie Kilroy then presented a series of photos of women's experiences in prison, and I was reminded - or should I say that I was (rightly) demanded to remember - that I have not been in prison, and that I cannot understand the experiences of women in prison.

I was inspired, shocked, appalled, and a little confused. This was my general reaction to the conference as a whole. I sat for fourty minutes at a time to hear magistrates, ministers, corrections officers speak, and convince me of the necessity and helpfulness of their work. I also heard from women who were really doing some useful work, and also from the prisoners themselves; of their experiences and suggested future directions. I was disappointed though, that the first speaker was a magistrate, and not an ex-prisoner. While many women who now work with S.I. are ex-prisoners, and some of these women did talk, the keynote speakers were overwhelmingly 'experts' on women in prison. And certainly the best workshops that I attended were those run by young women in prison and ex-prisoners.

The workshop hosted by the Stop the Women's Jail campaign was run in as democratic a manner as

possible. We sat in a circle, rather than having a panel speak to an audience. We provided information and an outline of what we wanted to talk about, so that people could have a better understanding of our perspective. We encouraged a discussion after a brief background of the campaign, rather than an extended lecture followed by minimal question time. While our workshop was not as large as some others, it was worthwhile. Our workshop, held on the last of three days, highlighted the uneasiness and confusion I had with the conference overall - I was interested in hearing about prisoners' experiences and perspectives, a critique of the prison industrial complex, and in seeing organisational practices of democracy. The choice and arrangement of the speakers, the format of the sections (lecture rather than discussion), and the content focused on reform was highly disappointing for me.

The final session of the conference was also frustrating - as we were running behind time, there was barely a chance for a discussion on the conference itself. The stance of the Stop the Women's Jail group was clear - no more jails. Other women thought that the emphasis needed to be on supporting the women currently in prison. I think that both of these actions are important and necessary,

however the sentiment of the conference was on reform, which meant that the S.T.W.J group were on the periphery of the conference. Not helping this distinction between people was that most of our group were generally younger than the rest of the conference goers. I felt that our age added to some people's perceptions that we weren't putting our energy to where it was needed - we were young and inexperienced. However, one woman on the panel said how glad she was that there were young women and men at the conference, and that our enthusiasm and dedication was welcome and vital.

Overall, I'm very thankful that I had the opportunity to attend the conference. While I've focused on some aspects of the conference that I disagreed with, there were many others that I agreed with, and was inspired and taught by. It was a great opportunity for women (the conference was attendees were about 99% women) prison workers and activists from all over the country and internationally to come together, to hear about each other's work, and to build networks. I would love to attend the next conference - when S.I. decide to host another.

Walkin' the Talk: A History of Sisters Inside (2001) Kate Warner. Please contact me if you'd like to borrow it.

Christine Carey - libertadomuerte@ozemail.com.au

THE WELFARE STATE

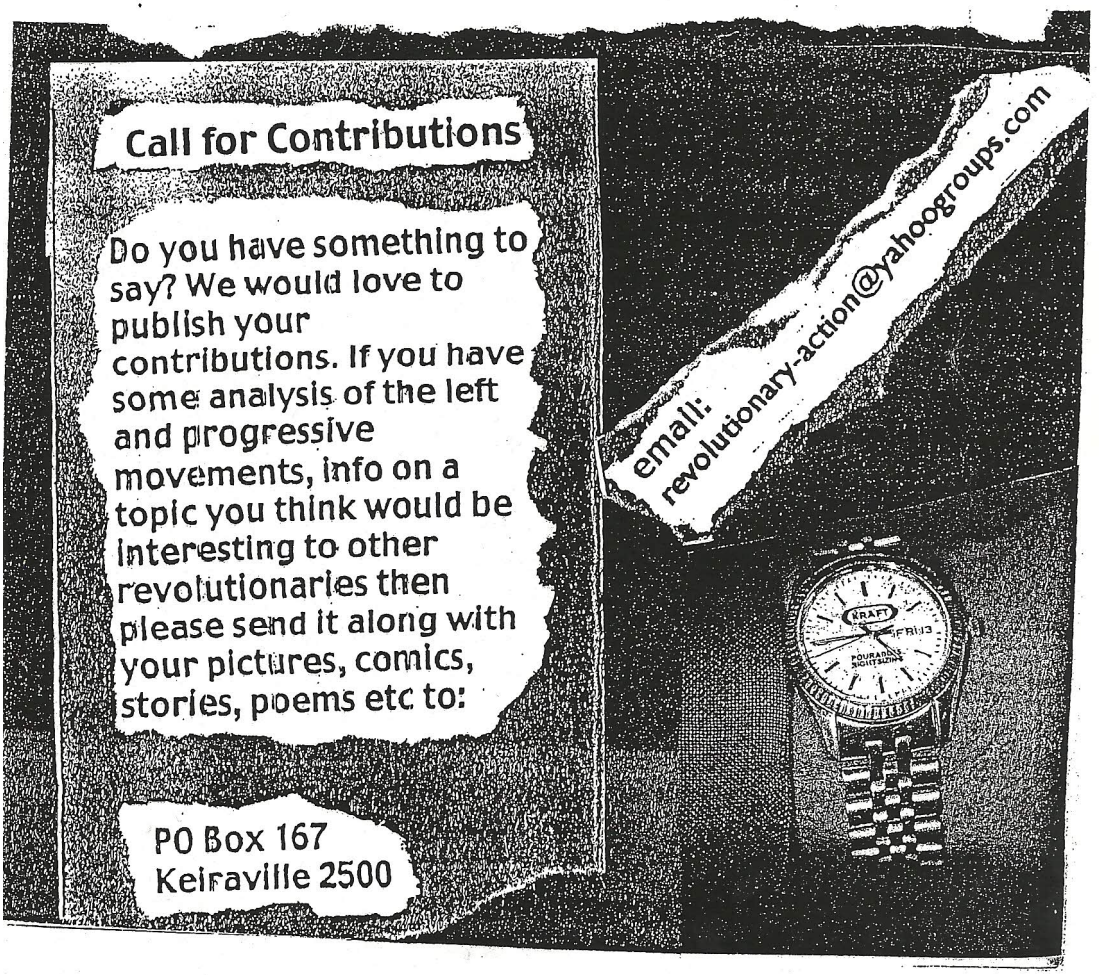
The community/welfare sector has grown out of the struggle between capital and the working class. While much of the sector was fought for and created by the struggles of the working class, the capitalist state generally dominates and defines its role. Since the struggles that have led to the development of the welfare state stopped short of revolution, the results have been utilised by capitalism to contain, co-opt and control the working class and undermine revolutionary struggle.

During the period of late capitalism the welfare state has been transformed, becoming more repressive and authoritarian. As capital has unleashed successful neo-liberal offensives, social democracy has found it increasingly difficult to defend a welfare state that is used to dehumanise, divide and control the working class. While the welfare sector is still a significant site of struggle, its main function is to tie the working class to the capitalist state and much of the working class recognise this. Why would unemployed and employed workers defend a sector that individualises and depersonalises them and forces them to become dependent on hierarchical authoritarian control mechanisms?

While the processes of the community/welfare sector are often represented as being democratic, in reality they are often the opposite. Welfare industry bureaucrats, following the dictates of government policy, usually decide the parameters within which the sector operates. The workers and participants in welfare programs may then be given some power in carrying out the decisions of the authorities. This process can then be presented as empowering when in fact it is a disguised form of control.

The current crisis in the welfare sector, which sees the privatisation of services and cuts in services is caused by it's growing incorporation into the capitalist productive process. As the state continues to erode the social conditions of the working class, the social control functions of the welfare sector are being strengthened. As an important part of the capitalist state's social control mechanisms, the welfare system is increasingly playing the role of policing and enslaving the working class. An example is "Work for the dole" which is supported by the Liberal and Labor Parties as a way to attack and divide employed and unemployed workers and serve the rich and powerful. While the poor are forced to work for below poverty benefits, those who use our blood, sweat and misery to enrich themselves are

building up multi-million dollar empires. Many churches, community groups and businesses are exploiting and abusing the unemployed and profiting off their suffering. While tens of thousands of workers are sacked, "work for dole" schemes keep growing. Governments and bosses use "unemployed" workers to destroy existing wages and conditions. Work for dole schemes are scab labour schemes based on a modern form of slavery. "Unemployed" workers must obey directives from the Federal Government and those who profit from these schemes, or have their poverty benefits cut. There is nothing to stop governments from sacking workers and replacing them with cheaper "unemployed" workers.

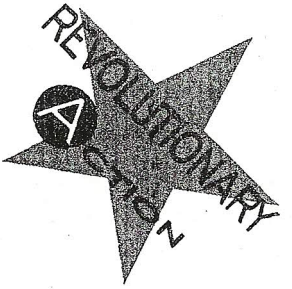

Call for Contributions
Do you have something to say? We would love to publish your contributions. If you have some analysis of the left and progressive movements, info on a topic you think would be interesting to other revolutionaries then please send it along with your pictures, comics, stories, poems etc to:
PO Box 167
Keiraville 2500
email:
revolutionary-action@yahoogroups.com
KRAFT

The welfare system helps to keep the working class in a subordinate and passive position; the receivers of help rather than active participants in the social processes that effect our lives. This is the core of a welfare system that disempowers us psychologically, socially and politically. The most oppressed sections of the working class are often represented by community/welfare workers, welfare bureaucrats or academics. Through the process of being represented by others, people are further marginalised, disempowered, manipulated and ignored. Self organisation and self representation opens up the possibility for people to become active participants in social processes rather than passive recipients or manipulated pawns. The structure of the community/welfare sector based on false divisions between "worker" and "client" acts as a barrier between people deterring their ability to work together, to share knowledge, to speak out and to create action for change.

Many community/welfare bureaucrats have a vested interest in keeping us disempowered. They can become more powerful and build their careers by helping to ensure our oppression and exploitation continues. As well, the practice of most welfare workers actually reinforces oppression and inequality by exerting power over the working class, rather than assisting us to exert our own collective power. Much of welfare practice concentrates on the problems of individuals and individual solutions to social problems. Through it's ideology and practice, the welfare system tends to reinforce people's belief that social problems are due to personal failings and inadequacies. Many welfare workers try to help their "clients" adjust to their situation rather than rejecting and altering it. Welfare workers seeking to genuinely assist people need to recognise that the welfare state is an instrument of class rule, perpetuating capitalism. This recognition can help them to see beyond the idea of helping people come to terms with unacceptable situations. Instead it opens up the possibility of acting together for social change. To do this we need to organise independently of the state in self reliant groups that nobody holds power over. Building power from below, based on participatory democracy, should be a priority for anyone interested in challenging the practices of the community/welfare sector.

Nick

What is Revolutionary Action?



Revolutionary Action (RA) has been established by a group of local people committed to a revolutionary transformation of society based on the united power of the working class. We have established RA because we disagree with various policies and practices of existing workers and revolutionary organisations. The main issue on which we differ is the nature of democracy, both within the revolutionary workers movement and a future society. This difference is reflected in how RA practices democracy and how we go about trying to assist in the achievement of a truly democratic society.

Revolutionary Action struggles for freedom and liberation to be achieved through a process in which people liberate themselves. To achieve this aim we support the self- mobilisation and self - organisation of the working class, who make up the vast majority of society. RA believes that only the collective democratic action of the oppressed can create a society based upon the fullest possible political democracy. We reject the hierarchical, authoritarian and anti-democratic practices of many workers organisations. RA has no hierarchy. All decisions are made by the membership and any administrative positions are without privilege, recallable and will only exist to administer decisions of the membership.

Revolutionary Action is a collective not a political party. Decisions of the collective may be publicly disagreed with and openly challenged by individual members or factions formed where a group of members disagree with the majority. We feel that the practice among some groups of restricting differences to secret internal debates denies the working class as a whole the ability to gain new ideas and perspectives from them. Democratic procedures are not adopted by RA because we are afraid of discipline or because they seem nicer, but because we think they help build a strong vibrant movement which actually poses a challenge to capitalism. We support the development of action and ideas that promote the concept of self management and try to counter and prevent bureaucracy, hierarchy and elites from emerging in our movement.

We try to cooperate and work with other revolutionary organisations as closely as possible. We believe that open, frank and constructive discussions and united action can assist revolutionary organisations and the workers movement in general. RA members participate in and try to build movements that fight against the misery of capitalism on everyday issues affecting the working class. We try to bring activists together to build campaigns, to fight for progressive social change and to work towards a better world. We try to find new strategies aimed at transforming working people's organisations into democratic, participatory, activist and campaigning bodies.

Revolutionary Action believes that not one group or organisation has a monopoly on the truth for the way forward. We feel that RA can make a contribution to the revolutionary movement but that many other organisations also make important contributions. RA sees itself as a group within the working class, not as intellectuals outside of the class and we do not pretend to represent the majority of people within the class. We wish to create an organisation where individuals who call themselves anarchists, socialists, communists or whatever, can come together to fight against capitalism and it's effects. Within the

boundaries that the collective believes, that the way to create a better world is through workers' self-liberation, the greatest amount of pluralism and debate is encouraged.

RA is trying to help organise the structure of a new society within the shell of the old. We view the democratic revolutionary movement as the embryo of a new society and the instrument for achieving it. We envisage a successful revolution being the result, not of a forcible seizure of state power nor the winning of an election, but of mass democratic action. We try to organise from the bottom up, arguing for full power within revolutionary organisations and mass movements for all working class people, so as to lay the foundations for real democracy.

RA stands for democracy, freedom, dignity, respect, peace and love. We try to build all of these amongst our families, our friends, our work mates and our communities. We oppose and try to defeat those who keep us down, spoil our lives and exploit us. No one in RA believes that we can create a class-less society just by being nice to one another, but neither do we believe that a truly revolutionary movement can be built unless those who are involved treat each other with respect, help to look after each other and try to create a living alternative to capitalism.

While the working class is presently demoralised and in disarray. It is still ready and capable of uniting and taking militant action. In the last few years we have seen tens of thousands of workers take part in militant action at the s l l blockades, the picket lines at Patrick's docks and against the atrocities in East Timor. These mobilisations were not organised by any single party or group. They were the result of different groups organising separately and linking together around common demands and in united action. They were a demonstration of the power of the working class.

RA wants to help build working class power. We do not seek leadership but rather try to assist ongoing struggles while drawing out and articulating their revolutionary implications. RA wants to be a flexible and innovative organisation that can help to educate and organise people. We aim to create, maintain and broaden networks in the international revolutionary movement and try to incorporate into every aspect of our practice democracy, an absence of authoritarianism or hierarchy. We challenge racism, sexism, homophobia and nationalism - all weapons the rulers use to pit us against each other. In the struggle for the renewal of the revolutionary movement, we try to disseminate the widest range of progressive writings and theory. We try to understand and popularise the contributions made to the movement by a wide variety of people and groups including those considered as "dissident", as well as the thousands of revolutionaries who may never have been regarded as leaders or written books.

There is no one strategy for creating a better world but a multiplicity of interrelated and complimentary strategies. The renewal of the revolutionary movement requires an understanding that there is no single way to be revolutionary, there are thousands of ways of being revolutionary. Through a democratic, militant and dynamic struggle against capitalism we aim to help transform ourselves, our class and the world. Revolutionary Action wants to help make it possible for people to gain control of their everyday lives and to help make life as marvelous and fulfilling as it can be.

Contact Information:
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